

SENATOR WITHEM: Yes, Mr. Speaker, members of the body, I greatly appreciate Senator Lamb's words, not those specifically addressed to the amendment, but those addressed to our process. I think I started the process in a very sincere fashion to bring parties together, to resolve an issue, to get it off the front pages of newspapers and get busy using our time to debate how we can best educate kids. I think it was interesting that last week the NRCSO organization, Nebraska Rural Community Schools Organization, issued a report, brought in an outside expert who studied Nebraska's schools. His conclusion was we, in Nebraska, are in danger of losing the educational quality, the edge we have in our schools, because we are spending too much time pitting urban against rural, rural against urban. That message came home to me, that is the message I had been singing ever since we established this committee and started sitting down and talking to people from the rural area, having them meet and visit with people from the other part of the state. I think it was a good message. Now, frankly, Dr. Shares (phonetic) remarks did not relate to the Class I situation, they related to the rural high school districts, but I think it is applicable to this situation. I appreciate very much Senator Lamb's remarks. The specific Lamb amendment, he just pointed out to me a short time ago language here in the bill making reference to the Legislature establishes its goals for the reorganization of school districts that all real property and elementary and secondary students should be within school districts which offer education in grades kindergarten through 12. He pointed that language out to me, it reminded me of a problem we had in the ad hoc committee last summer when we used the language "school districts" and caused almost a splitting apart of the committee at that time. When we came back and discussed what is the problem, we were told if you're talking about a system that offers K-12 education, that implies that there may be other options for forming that system other than what we traditionally think of as mandatory school district reorganization, or voluntary school district reorganization, that there may be other options available. And they much preferred the word "systems". When drafting the bill we used the word "district". If that is causing problems to people in understanding what our intent is, I would say that we should change the amendment, and I think change the language, and I'm supporting Senator Lamb's substitution of the word "systems" which implies a broader concept maybe than the traditional K through 12 district. And, with that, I support the Lamb amendment.